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TitleSome parents' questions answered

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Some Parents' Questions

Answered

PATRICIA EDGE

Here, concisely and directly expressed, are the answers to all those difficult questions that children ask. We are told how to reply when they ask to be told about birth and death and about religion. Should children be allowed to believe in fairies and Father Christmas—only to be subsequently disillusioned? Is it true that to be anti-fairy will destroy a child's imagination? Is corporal punishment sound, or is there a better and more effective way of imposing discipline? What is the importance of play-fantasies in the life of a child? What is the best way of dealing with thumbsucking, bed-wetting and food fads? What are parents to do with the young rebel, how are they to cope with tantrums, defiance, destructiveness, shyness and other similar problems?

To all these problems the writer, drawing upon a life-long experience in the field, has

SOME PARENTS'
QUESTIONS ANSWERED

by
PATRICIA EDGE

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Introductory

Some years ago when I was editor of a parents' magazine, I had the invaluable opportunity of reading the questions which mothers and nurses—and even fathers—poured into the office. Many of these dealt with questions of feeding the baby during the first twelve months of his life, but I do not intend in this book to deal with such questions, as with books, pamphlets, magazine articles, clinics, and welfare centres at every mother's disposal, it is hardly necessary. But, after the feeding queries, one could sort the other questions out under several definite headings; questions which in some cases are not so easily answered by hard and fast rules, but which none the less were giving anxiety to hundreds of readers. In this book I hope to answer such problems more fully than it is possible to do so by letters, and because I feel that some of them are questions which some parents or would-be parents are undecided over.

Where children, or in fact any human beings, are concerned it is very difficult indeed to lay down any hard and fast rules as to management. There are so many differing factors that have to be taken into account: The child's inherited instincts and propensities; his environment; his educational facilities, his health and so on, each one of these

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making his problems individual, and in need of individual treatment. But there is, loosely speaking, an average child, and there is the ideal environment which we should aim at for his normal maturing, and working on this basis, it is possible to give broad lines for his upbringing.

The criticism with which I am most frequently faced, although I admit it is generally voiced by unmarried people, is 'but surely a mother doesn't need all this advice and guidance. From the moment her baby is born, her natural instincts tell her what to do?' Now I have had a baby, and when she was first left in my sole keeping, far from feeling bolstered up by any natural instincts, I don't mind admitting that I was most frightfully afraid of her! I wanted to do the best for her, but was afraid of doing the worst. Possibly if I had been on a desert island, my natural instinct for protecting her would have come to my aid, and I would have reared a child after a fashion, but it would not have been a twentieth-century product! But we don't live on a desert island, but in a highly civilized community, and that being so, it is a very natural instinct to want to take the advice on matters of importance of people who have already had the experience which is new to us, or who have the knowledge and technical skill.

Many of the problems that arise in parents' minds are directly the outcome of our changing ways and outlook. Take the infant feeding problems for instance. In former times, when a mother couldn't herself breast feed the baby, a wet nurse was engaged. Nowadays we put the infant on to dried milks or modified cow's milk mixtures. Naturally, the question arises in each mother's mind, which is the best substitute? Another very frequently recurring question was 'Should we send our child to a nursery school, or is home the best place for him?' This would not have arisen say in

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the Victorian era—there *was* only the home. ‘To smack or not to smack’ is another very prominent post-bag problem. It would never have occurred then; the kindest-hearted father would have thought it a flagrant neglect of his parental duty not to use corporal punishment for matters of discipline.

Like the natives, the Victorian women had a sort of tribal lore which dictated most of their actions for them. But possibly, one of the greatest differences between the Victorian parent and the modern is that the Victorian father wanted to make his child as good a man as he was, while the modern parent, his mind sharpened by the rapidly developing science of child psychology, wants to make his child a better man than he is.

Nowadays we are in an interim phase. The new ideas are in practice, but have not been in practice long enough for people generally to judge fully of their results. But a tremendous amount of research and experimental work is being carried out by psychologists and educationalists, and I think it is safe to say that future generations of parents will once again have a sort of tribal code to guide them.

I

Storms in a Tea-Cup

The Problem of Bad Habits

After the feeding queries, the most frequently recurring problem in our post-bag was that good old nursery diehard 'Bad Habits', and in particular bed-wetting. I dislike making sweeping statements, but I think I can safely generalize here in saying that more nursery battles have been fought, and lost, over the question of 'learning to be clean' than over any other question. Bewildered mothers, angry mothers, ashamed mothers, distracted mothers, all with the burning question 'but what can I do?'

Most parents know by now that babies should be 'held out' from a few weeks' old before and after feeding times, and on awakening. Most parents do this and have some success at even two months of age. But after being clean, or almost clean for quite a period, somewhere about the fourteenth month the toddler begins to wet his bed again, or wet his knickers during the day, and then the trouble begins.

Mother is upset, of course, when this frequently happens and shows it to the toddler. Or she is over-anxious for him to be clean and watches him tensely and with tremendous anxiety whenever she puts him on his little pot. And again she lets the child see her anxiety. Or she allows him to sit

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there for far too long until in the end he doesn't attempt to do anything except play. There is nothing more likely to prolong the habit than these reactions to it. So first of all, where persistent bed-wetting occurs, avoid at all costs making a nursery issue out of it. If the toddler wets his knickers, put him into a clean pair without making any comment other than to remind him quietly that he should have used the pot. If he wets his sheet at night, again make no undue comment. When he is clean and dry, praise him and show him your pleasure. Children usually learn to be dry during the daytime quicker than they do at night. In cases of bed-wetting, give the child no liquids after five o'clock, see that he uses the pot before going to bed, and lift him at ten o'clock.

Unfortunately what so often happens is that the mother despairs of getting the child clean and cannot maintain an equable disposition over the problem. She scolds him, she may even punish him. She bribes him, cajoles him, in fact, when potting time comes round, the whole household seethes with tension to see whether he will duly perform or not. And all of this, of course, is vastly entertaining to the child. Possibly at no other time during the day does he get so much undivided adult attention. It is very gratifying to him and he likes to prolong it.

But there is another side to his reactions as well. If he has been scolded and punished for the offence, and if it has become a real issue in the household, he may become over-anxious about it himself, and in his very nervousness will wet the bed or his knickers. So for these two main reasons we should try and avoid making scenes about bed and knicker wetting.

Some children give no difficulties in this direction at all, while another child, with the same training and for no apparent reason is a 'little terror' over it. If only we could

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remain detached about the trouble, merely praising the child when it uses its pot and keeps his bed dry, but refraining from showing annoyance or disgust when he lapses, I do think that in most cases the trouble would be less prolonged. What so often happens though is that the parent becomes 'ashamed' about it, and feels that in some way the child's inability to keep clean is a reflection on herself. Mrs. X's little boy next door, who is only two, is perfectly clean day and night, and what ever will Mrs. X think of her (she argues) when she sees wet sheets and nighties on the line daily, when her little girl is nearly four. She feels that at all costs she must get the child clean, not merely because of the extra work this trouble causes, but because of what the neighbours will think.

Naturally the child must be made to learn that clean knickers and a clean bed are the normal way of behaving, and our attitude should be one of helpfulness and encouragement to reach a more grown-up standard. When he slips below the standard, then we say, 'What a pity, let's try again to-morrow.' When he is successful then we show pleasure. It is quite a good plan to encourage the child, to make a little chart out for him, and put a red cross each day when he is clean, and no mark when he lapses. Then the child becomes quite eager to see how many red marks he can get. But if this makes him over-anxious about the subject, then discontinue it.

Bad habit number two which causes the next greatest number of parental headaches, was thumb sucking. The child resorts to thumb-sucking as a form of consolation. We feel that as he grows older and has more outside interests the habit should discontinue; and it usually does. If after the age of five, say, the child still thumb-sucks, there are many people who will say that this is an indication that there is

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something wrong with the child, or with his environment. There is something 'lacking in his life' and to console himself for it, he sucks his thumb. It is considered 'abnormal' and therefore requires investigation. Personally I think this is a very far-fetched theory and with little basis in fact.

Professor Valentine, and I hope that this will console parents of elderly thumb-suckers, refers in his book, *The Difficult Child and the Problem of Discipline*, to a recent investigation in which sixty 'problem' children were compared with sixty normal children. Both groups ranged in age from two to six years. Of the sixty 'problem' children, twenty-six were thumb-suckers; of the sixty normal children, *twenty-eight* were thumb-suckers. Prolonged thumb-sucking then need not be considered in itself as a sign of abnormality or inner distress.

Thumb-sucking usually begins in infancy. If we see the baby sucking, then gently remove her thumb from the mouth. It will probably remain out of her mouth while she continues to sleep. As the baby grows older and becomes 'a toddler', then if we notice her thumb-sucking, give her some soft cuddly toy, or some intriguing toy, such as a tin with some pennies in which she can shake, rattle, and generally investigate. Don't scold her for thumb-sucking, don't make an issue out of the question or a cause for conflicts between child and parent, and don't resort to splints and gloves and similar methods to restrict the habit. It merely focuses the child's attention all the more on the question.

Apart from these measures very little else can be done. Most children stop thumb-sucking when they reach school age, and have all the interests of school work and companions to distract their attention. Some, even then, continue the habit, but as is indicated by the investigation already quoted, this need not necessarily mean that they are 'ab-

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normal' in any way, or suffering from some deprivation of which we are not aware. With such older children, it is quite possible that they resort to the habit through boredom or tiredness. Possibly they are not getting enough sleep or rest, or possibly they are in a class which is doing work beyond their abilities, so that they become discouraged and consequently bored. It might be worth while, if they seem listless or tired, to review their routine and to make sure that they are getting adequate rest and sleep for their age.

Bad habit number three, is masturbation. Most mothers who wrote on this subject wrote in a shocked and horrified strain. They seemed to think that the practice of this habit showed some special depravity on their child's part, and that at all costs he must be stopped. Now most children masturbate at some time or another. I think one could even go so far as to say that it is the rule, rather than the exception. When we consider that the baby explores every part of his body, plays with his toes and fingers, pinches and pats his tummy and legs, it is very natural that at some time he should explore other regions of his body and find that he gets a pleasant sensation from doing so. That is all that there is to this habit, in most cases. It does not mean that the child is a monster of depravity, or that he will become one; it is not connected in any way with sex. It is merely a bodily sensation in which he finds pleasure. Prolonged practice of the habit will not, as so many people believe, lead to insanity. A number of distinguished alienists made an investigation some time ago on the causes of insanity in children, *and in no single case* was masturbation found to be the cause.

If we take no notice of the practice, merely giving him a toy to cuddle or play with he will probably lose interest in it as he grows older and has more outside interests. It is as well to get him up in the morning as soon as he wakes, as often

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this practice is indulged in then, when the toddler is bored and has nothing to do. If he is sat up in his bed, with his dressing gown on, and some picture books and toys to play with and look at, he is far less likely to do it. As with thumb-sucking, boredom and tiredness are the two things to avoid. As with bed-wetting, punishments and scoldings and splints are most likely to prolong the habit.

The parent's attitude is of course all important. If she can realize that her child is not unique and that nearly every other child does the same thing, then I think this will prevent that atmosphere of tension and anxiety arising at all, and it is an atmosphere which the child will sense, and this in turn will help to focus his mind on the practice.

When we are experiencing any of these troubles with our children, they loom tremendously in our minds. We experience worry and anxiety which is quite disproportionate to the problem. When they are passed, we are apt to look back and think 'well that was after all rather a storm in a tea-cup.' To every mother who is worried over one or all of these problems I would like to say, then, 'it will pass'. In nine cases out of ten, given patience, tact, and sympathetic understanding, it *will* pass.

2

Corporal Punishment *—or What?*

The other day during a long train journey, I witnessed what is, unfortunately, quite a typical domestic scene. Rex, a little boy of three, was standing by the window which was down. As it went into the tunnel, a man leant forward and pulled the window up, catching the child's fingers in it. He let out a terrific yowl of protest, and no wonder. His finger was badly bruised and it must have been extremely painful. The window had hurt him, and so, in the undisciplined and childlike manner of that age, he tried to hurt the window; he punctuated his cries with kicks at the door.

Actually he wasn't strong enough to harm the woodwork, and if left alone for a few moments he would have soon calmed down and been ready to be comforted by his mother. But the other passengers, all very elderly, obviously thought his behaviour dreadful and showed it by their manner, so Rex's mother, fearful, obviously, of public opinion, leant forward and told him to stop. He wouldn't, so she smacked him hard. He retaliated by smacking her, and in a few moments it was quite a little free fight, with Rex's mummy losing any dignity she had had at the beginning. They got out at the next station, and the rest of the compartment settled back comfortably in their seats and spent the rest of

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the journey talking about the 'manners of the younger generation' and 'if he had been mine I would have given him a jolly good hiding', and so on.

It seemed to me, as I watched that scene, that two things dominated Rex's mother's mind. One, she was fearful of public opinion, and two, she was really undecided as to the best way to handle him. This preoccupation with other people's opinions and this dreadful indecision seem to be two of the main stumbling blocks with many parents.

The first is easy to deal with. We should make a resolution that so far as our children are concerned we will deal with them *as we honestly believe correct*. Never mind if it is at variance with neighbours and relatives, so long as we think we are doing right, and are consistent. What *does* it matter if Great-Aunt Sally thinks Jane is 'spoilt' because we give in to her over some unimportant matter, when we know that in the big important things, she is unquestioningly obedient?

Other people only see the child in flashes. We see the composite picture. They are in no position to judge either the child's behaviour or our treatment of it. But they will judge, you can be sure, and all you can do, is to take no notice but to go your own way, unflustered and unashamed.

The second problem is more difficult to deal with. Many parents face this question of bringing up the child in rather a haphazard manner. They have no definite ideas on how they should discipline the child. They may have read a lot and observed other parents and children a lot, and have come to certain conclusions, but they are not sure enough of themselves to stick to these conclusions in face of criticism or initial failure. They may believe, for instance, that corporal punishment is not only wrong, but finally ineffective, so they say, 'We won't smack our child.' And they don't. Then comes a time when the child develops some specific 'naughti-

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ness', such as openly defying the mother. She tries coaxing, pleas to his better nature, some mild form of punishment. Nothing works. In desperation, or because of other people's opinions, she tries a 'jolly good smacking'. She repeats it several times. It doesn't work. So, undecided, she returns to her former methods of pacification. And then finally she writes up in despair, 'What shall I do, I've tried coaxing and being nice to him, I've tried smacking and being cross with him, but neither way works? What should I do?'

This is not quoted at random by any means. This formula was used over and over again in the bewildered, anxious and often quite desperate letters that came into the office. Whether we believe in corporal punishment or not, we should at least follow one theory or the other. It is fatal to be inconsistent in our methods.

Personally I have no use for corporal punishment as a deterrent with children at all, and I am convinced that they can be brought up properly without being smacked. I know innumerable such children, and of course it is quite out of the question ever to smack a child at a modern Residential or Day Nursery. Furthermore, no one who is to-day being *trained* for child care work would resort to corporal punishment.

In the first place, this method doesn't help the child to know *why* his behaviour is wrong; secondly, it is a method of discipline by fear rather than by a knowledge of right and wrong. Thirdly, unless it is applied to a very vigorous (and to me distasteful) degree, it is not finally effective. I am talking here of the older child of from three years upwards, who is capable of understanding why certain behaviour is reasonable and other behaviour unreasonable. Below this age, the child is like a small puppy or kitten, and a little smack accompanied by a firm 'no' when he does some undesirable

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thing, is of no harm at all. But these slaps are not ‘corporal punishment’.

But how are we going to punish a child if we don’t use smacking? Personally I favour the method, like the public executioner in *The Mikado*, of making the punishment fit the crime, whenever possible. If Jane, for instance, is all dressed up in her ‘best’ ready to go and see Granny, and we tell her to keep clean and not get messy while we get ourselves dressed, and then, after ten minutes, when we come down and find her grubby and in a bad state, what do we do? Smacking will be unpleasant for her at the time, but it is soon over, and the ten minutes’ horse-play that came before it may have been well worth while. If, however, we say quite quietly and calmly, ‘What a shame you have dirtied yourself; I’m afraid you can’t go to Granny’s now, but will have to stay at home because you haven’t got another pretty frock,’ then that is going to give her something to think about for quite a long while. But she must understand that she has had to stay at home not as a punishment but as a natural result of her silly behaviour.

Moreover, although smacking is unpleasant at the time, it doesn’t show her that all-important point, that if we behave in an anti-social manner, we suffer for it socially. A smacking doesn’t show her dramatically just *why* she shouldn’t have dirtied her dress. But if she has to stay at home because she hasn’t anything clean to wear, it does give her a definite and easily understood reason for why she should have kept clean.

If a punishment is to be effective it should teach the child just *why* certain behaviour is wrong.

Finally, next time she is dressed up and ready to go out, she will remember that if she gets dirty she will be deprived of some privileged outing or treat and I think that the fear of

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this will prove a more effective deterrent than the fear of a smacking.

I think this type of punishment is so effective because it is capable of infinite variations. If a child is smacked too often he becomes 'hardened' to it. It begins to mean less and less. He is unlikely ever to become hardened to this other type of punishment because it takes so many differing forms, and because it leaves a far more lasting impression on his mind. If he spoils some particular treasure of ours, which he has been forbidden to touch, then we can confiscate (for a time anyway) some treasure of his. He will then know exactly how our own feelings were when we found our beloved object destroyed. If we smack him, apart from the fact that it is over in a few minutes, he has no such valuable object lesson.

To those parents who say that this method is 'too soft' I would point out that mentally it is far severer. The physical pain of a smacking is soon over, but the mental pain of being deprived of some treasured plaything for a week or so, is far severer and lasts over a longer period. It is justifiable only because it does show the child dramatically what happens to people who go against the social code, and thereby helps him to *conform* to this social code.

Then there is one final, and very big point, in favour of this type of punishment. It is suitable to almost every type of child, except one who is very backward mentally, and to any age. Corporal punishment, used on children of a certain type or temperament can be harmful. The sensitive, highly-strung child, for instance, will probably be made even more highly strung and nervous by severe chastisement. The weak-willed child may fall back on deceitfulness and slyness and lying, to avoid it. The older child, particularly if a girl, may feel a dreadful sense of shame and a loss of caste, from a

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whacking, which she does not feel with the other type of punishment.

There is something very undignified to the older child about a smacking, and when we consider for a moment our feelings when we 'lose our dignity' it will help us to get the thing into perspective. The child does feel too that he has been smacked, not so much as a point of justice, but because his parent wants to vent his anger of the moment. So together with his sense of shame, he feels a sense of injustice. Most smacking takes place because we lose our tempers. We lose our tempers and for a moment we lose our control as well. It is not only bad for children to witness this lack of control, but it is bad for us to get into the way of giving into it. If we cannot ourselves control our tempers and our actions, how can we hope to help our children to be both controlled and disciplined?

I have met quite a number of people, however, who raise their eyebrows very high indeed when they hear one advocating punishment of any sort at all. 'I thought you were "advanced" or "modern"', they say, a little cattishly, 'and believe in the child having freedom in which to develop. Surely all punishment is repressive?' It seems difficult to believe that people at this period should really think in this way, but I have met with this sort of statement so frequently that I am forced to take notice of it.

What so many parents are apt to confuse, is the difference between discipline and self-discipline. The old way was to say 'thou shalt not' and leave it at that. The modern way is to say 'it's not right, or customary, or sensible to do that, because . . .' You don't merely forbid the child to do a thing; you point out to him why it is unwise or wrong to do it. Secondly, although it is considered best that the child should have freedom for expression, this freedom has to be confined

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within certain bounds, for the child's safety, for our safety and the general comfort of the community. He will find these 'bounds' in later life, and unless he has learnt to keep within them while young, he is going to have a very tough time as an adult.

The other day I was told of a mother whose six year old son put a burning hot coal on to his pet cat's back. The father wanted to punish the child, but the mother refused to hear of any action being taken on the grounds that the child must have freedom for 'self-expression'! I couldn't help wondering what the mother's reactions would have been if the child had attempted to 'express' himself by experimenting on *her*. Most children do cruel things to their pets and animals at some time or another, although they most certainly should have learnt not to do these things by the time they have reached six years, and, naturally, if they won't obey, some form of punishment should be taken. A severe smacking *might* cure the youngster, but with a certain type of child it might only serve to make him more spiteful to the pet when he thinks he is unobserved. Here again one can accomplish more by making the punishment fit the crime. One can tell the child, and I have always found this most effective, that if he ever deliberately hurts the animal again, it will be given away.

Many children too go through a phase of being spiteful to other children and this is more difficult to deal with. Here the only line one can take is to pet the hurt child very assiduously while ignoring the attacker. This won't attain immediate good results (nor will smacking for that matter), but it usually has a good effect in the long run. Many parents try to cure this phase by smacking or scratching the attacker, or by imitating whatever form of attack he used 'so that he can see what it feels like', but I think this is worse than useless,

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for the toddler will only reason to himself, 'Well, if Mummy does it, so can I', and it is more likely to prolong the phase than anything else.

The great thing to bear in mind when you are dealing with a child in a difficult mood, is to be as unemotional as possible yourself. Don't fly into a temper, or shout, or show the child that he has accomplished the very thing he wants to accomplish, to get you flustered or provoked. Speak to him in a voice which sounds perfectly self-assured. If you are threatening to punish him, do it quietly and calmly, but at the same time, quite definitely, as if there were absolutely no question that you mean what you say. Heaps of mothers, in moments of nursery battle, make their threats in very wavering tone, admonishment mixed with pleadings to his better nature, threats mixed with cajolery. 'If you don't finish up your pudding, John', they say, very briskly and firmly, 'I shan't take you to Granny this afternoon. Now I really mean it.' And then, pleadingly, 'Come on, John, be a good boy and make Mummy happy. There's just another nice little mouthful.' Then, very terribly, 'JOHN, do you want to go to Granny or not?' Then 'Poor Mummy, spending such a long time to cook you that nice dinner and now you won't eat. Don't you love Mummy; don't you want to make her happy?' And so on, *ad infinitum*.

There should be none of this. The threat should be delivered quietly and firmly; if the child still doesn't eat, then the plate should be removed and the afternoon visit cancelled. But, the moment the decided gesture of removing the plate is made, most children will immediately set to and finish up the dish. If the mother is unsure of herself, the child will sense it, and will take a delight in 'playing her up'.

Of course, it is much easier and much quicker to smack a child instead of reasoning with him or remaining quite firm,

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but it is well worth the extra trouble in view of his future development. But it is fundamentally important that the mother should believe in what she is doing, as otherwise the child will sense her own feelings of doubt and insecurity and she will be unsuccessful.

3

Fact or Fiction?

‘Mummy, who made the trees? Mummy, why is it daytime? Why is it Sunday? How do the trains go? What is rain?’

Who, what, why, why, WHY! Was there ever a parent who hasn't been teased by this endless battery of questions?

How easy, how gloriously simple it must have been, when with utmost confidence and faith we could reply, as the Victorians *did* reply ‘God’. God made this; God ordained that; God arranged the other. It was a never-failing response; satisfactory, no doubt, both to parent and child alike. Nowadays there are many parents who can still answer their children's questions in this way. There are some who blend with spirituality a certain amount of materialism; there are others, many others who don't quite know what to do. They feel the child needs some spiritual guidance, but they don't quite like to deviate too far from scientific facts.

There is of course only one sound and sincere way of dealing with your child's questions, and that is to tell him what you yourself honestly believe. You cannot teach a child a doctrine that you don't believe in yourself. At least, you cannot teach it him with any conviction; nor will he be con-

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vinced. And I think it is a good ruling, too, to give your child the scientific answer wherever you can. If for instance he asks 'Who made the rain', it is *easy* to answer 'God', but there is an actual atmospheric condition which causes the rain, so why not explain it simply to your youngster. 'Why is it day and night?' Here again it is easy and final to say that God gave us daylight to work in and night-time to rest in, but it is more exact to explain simply how we get day and night. Even a young child can understand the explanation if you stick a piece of paper on an apple (our place on the world), and hold it to the light (the sun). Then slowly revolve it round and he can see for himself that our spot gradually turns away from the light into the shadow. He will be taught these things later in school and then he will wonder whom to believe—his teacher or his parent.

The 'God' answer is fundamentally correct because behind the scientific facts, and the biological facts we always stumble up against the unknown beginning of everything. Even with the explanation of daylight and night-time the older and more intelligent child will say, 'Yes, but who arranged it all that way?' If you are a materialist you will no doubt reply 'That is something we none of us know.' If you have a faith, you will reply 'God'. Either reply is suitable according to your own personal beliefs. It is only when we short circuit the child's questions by answering lazily, 'I don't know' to everything, or 'God' to everything, that we limit the child's general knowledge, and it is only when we give replies in which we don't believe ourselves, that we are likely to get involved or badly stumped.

But untruthful replies are never more harmful than when they are in answer to questions on the 'facts of life'. It is a sad reflection that parents' replies to these questions are so unsatisfactory that the Board of Education has been seri-

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ously thinking of issuing instructions to teachers to give this information as part of their curriculum.

It seems difficult to believe that in these enlightened days mothers still tell children that baby came from such and such a store, or from the chemists, or the doctor brought her in a big bag, or we found her in the garden. But they do; I have overheard such conversations and mothers themselves have confessed to such conversations. Some day the child will have to learn the real facts. She will then ask herself, 'Why was I told that nonsense before?' and she will come to the conclusion that no doubt it had been a tabooed subject because it was 'rude'. So the lovely and amazing story of child-birth becomes something that at best must never be mentioned in polite society, and at the worst, to be whispered over in furtive corners.

The child, according to his mental alertness will begin to ask questions on 'Where did I come from?' from the age of about three onwards. At this age he will probably be quite satisfied with the reply 'from Mummy's tummy'. He doesn't usually ask beyond this fact. And do you know what the average child's reaction is to this reply? One of definite and quite matter-of-fact pleasure. The tie between mother and child is so strong at this age that he loves her probably more than any other adult in his immediate family, and he is normally delighted to think that he had been so close to her.

Later he will want to know more: how he got into her tummy and out of it and here again we should reply simply and truthfully, never telling him more than he asks for, never bringing up the subject ourselves, never being in the slightest bit sentimental, but always practical and matter of fact. These latter factors are very important. If you invariably have a different tone of voice for these questions this

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alone is sufficient to give them an added significance. But if you answer them casually, just as you do his everyday questions of where did we get the bread from, then the information will have no exaggerated or unusual significance.

The pity of it is that so few parents really can allow themselves to be casual. We are hampered by the ideas and the angle that we have inherited or unconsciously absorbed. But what we have to remember is that *everything* is new and fresh and rather wonderful to children. They are all the time receiving facts and information about their surroundings, so that they come to accept everything quite casually. The fact that babies are kept warm and safe inside their mummies until they are big enough for a separate existence is no more extraordinary to them than that birds have wings to fly with, or fishes gills to breathe with under water. It is only the adult who from her previous upbringing has learnt to give this side of nature an undue significance.

Children, if we have always been truthful and sincere with them, will believe implicitly what we tell them, and the information is stored away and kept in the back of their minds, where it should be. If we fob them off with tales of the stork and the gooseberry bush variety, they are bound later on to discover that they have been deceived and it is only *then* that the whole subject suddenly develops prominence, and the knowledge which they pick up, probably in quite an undesirable manner, gets linked in their minds with something furtive and unwholesome.

We can make a toddler believe almost anything. What a pity then to destroy this trust and confidence, and what an infinite pity to let her grow up to believe that the wonderful story of birth is something which should only be talked about in whispers.

For those parents who feel that their own technical know-

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ledge is limited I recommend them to read K. de Schweinitz's book, *How a Baby is Born*. This is an excellent and most helpful little book and one which the older child can read for himself. It is simply written, unemotionally presented and of course scientifically exact.

Pets and livestock generally are, of course, a great help, and where space permits, a variety of pets and their young should be a part of every child's daily life. The cat with her kittens, the bitch with her puppies, the doe with her baby bunnies, what an excellent and spontaneous object lesson they are to the child.

It is a help too where children are accustomed to running about in their own household undressed and seeing their parents undressed. They get used, in this manner, to the difference between an adult's physique and a child's in a perfectly natural and normal way. Anything, in fact, which helps a child to accept natural laws in a casual everyday manner, is a healthy approach. When they ask, as they will assuredly ask, 'but why must we ever wear clothes?' then say that we wear them as a protection against cold and dirt and dust, which is more or less true.

Death and anything connected with it, such as graves, cemeteries, coffins, and so on, were another group of questions that worried parents.

Children vary tremendously as to when they broach this subject. It depends upon so many environmental factors; whether they hear their parents talking about the subject; whether there is a death in their immediate household; whether they were brought into contact with it during the raids and so on. If the child can get used to the idea of death through discovering the deaths of animals and household pets, this is probably the happiest approach to the subject if we are always casual and matter of fact about it ourselves.

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From this he will probably ask, on his own account, 'do people die?'

In our own household we had always treated the subject of death in a very casual, everyday manner, but were careful never to lay any stress on it. When S. was two and a half she first saw a dead hen and asked what was wrong with it.

Self. 'It's what we call dead.'

S. 'Is it asleep?' (noting the shut eyes and still form).

Self. 'No. It's like sleep, but it won't wake up.'

S. 'Does it like being dead?'

Self. 'It doesn't know anything about it. You don't know anything when you're asleep. The hen doesn't know anything now.'

S. 'Can it still eat and lay eggs now?'

Self. 'No, it doesn't do anything at all now.'

S. stared at it for some time and then went over to her sand pit and went on digging. She didn't refer to the incident again until she was three years, when we had a fowl for dinner. She had seen it hanging up waiting to be dressed and cooked.

S. 'Is it dead?'

Self. 'Yes. Daddy killed it. We are going to have it for dinner.'

S. 'Good. I like chucky-hen meat. Do you remember we had it at X's?'

Self. 'Yes.'

S. 'Do we eat all animals?'

Self. 'Not all.'

S. 'What do we eat?'

Self. 'Hens, ducks, pigs, rabbits, cows, sheep, and fishes.'

S. 'Not cats, dogs, or horses?'

Self. 'No.'

S. 'Why not?'

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Self. 'They don't taste nice. Horses would be very tough. (Note: the first adult inclination is to say that one is fond of dogs and cats and usually treats them as pets. This should be avoided. It is unwise to bring the question of sentiment into the subject at all. Also, most children have an affection for all animals, and they would find it difficult to make any distinction between fondness for a cat and fondness for a pig.)

S. 'Do the animals mind?'

Self. 'No. They are dead. They don't know anything.'

These replies seemed to satisfy her, as we had no more on the question until she was five years, four months, when, off her own bat, she asked me one day, 'Do people die?'

Self. 'Yes.'

S. 'Why?'

Self. 'When they are very old, they usually die.'

S. 'What's it like to be dead?'

Self. 'You don't feel anything. It's like being asleep.'

S. 'What do we do with dead people?'

Self. 'We put them in a nice big bed, like a box, it's called a coffin, and put them underneath the ground.'

S. 'Why?'

Self. 'Because it's neat and tidy to do that.' (Note: this usually seems to be a very satisfactory answer to young children. It is one they can understand and fits in with their own rather practical approach to things. It also avoids any question of sentiment again.)

S. (after a long pause). 'Will you die before me?'

Self. 'I expect so.'

S. (indignantly). 'But who will look after me?'

Self. 'Oh, I shall be very very old then. Much older than Gran. And by that time you will be grown up and not need me to look after you. You will probably have a little girl of your own who *you* will be busy looking after.' (This quite

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satisfied her and once again the question was dropped for quite a long period. But unfortunately when she was five years ten months, a friend of hers had an elder brother killed in the Air Force and she wept a good deal about it in front of S., saying all the time, 'Oh, dear. Poor J., poor J.' (J. being the brother.))

S. was very distressed that night when she went to bed and called me up asking for a light in her room (which she had never previously had) and saying she couldn't sleep because she kept on having 'nasty thoughts'.

Self. 'What are your nasty thoughts?'

S. 'I keep on thinking of poor J. being deaded.'

Self. 'But he's not a poor J. He's quite all right now.'

S. 'He must be a poor J.' Cos B.' (the little girl friend) 'kept on crying about him. She wouldn't have cried if she hadn't been sorry for him.'

Self. 'B. was only crying because she was sorry J. wouldn't be coming home any more. B. was sorry for *herself*, not for J.'

S. 'I'm frightened about being deaded. I'm frightened about you being deaded.'

Self (quietly but very emphatically). 'I told you, S. I shall be your mummy for years and years and years yet. Look how very old Gran is and she's still living with us. Shall I give you some nice thoughts to think about?'

S. 'Yes.'

Self. 'Well, to-morrow Auntie N. is coming to town and I thought you could put on your new frock and we'd meet her at the station and go out to the restaurant for a special tea. Now I'm going downstairs and you shut your eyes and think of all the nice things you are going to choose for tea.' I left her with a soft light and the door half open and she went off to sleep, but the question came up over and over again after this until she was six years and two months when

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I pointed out to her that B. was quite happy now and one soon got over one's unhappiness. I told her that when she fell over and cut her knee badly it hurt her for two or three days, but she couldn't remember it now, and it was just the same with B. She had been hurt at first when J. was killed, but now she had forgotten it. This seemed to satisfy her, as she has never had 'nasty thoughts' on this subject again.

I have quoted these conversations at length, because I think they show one very important thing. While we talked about the question without showing any emotion, or without giving her any idea that death was associated with grieving, she accepted it quite calmly and as something that happened to everyone quite normally. But the moment the idea of grief and sadness was expressed to her through B's fit of crying, the question began to trouble her and gave her a feeling of insecurity.

Now once a child has a fear of this nature, we should sympathize with him and help him to overcome it by letting him talk about it. It is never wise to make the child drive his fear inwards, and it can be definitely harmful to try and 'laugh' him out of it. Let him talk about it, preferably early during the day, and not, if possible, just before bedtime, and from his talk and questions you will be given the clue how to reply reassuringly and helpfully. These fears are very, very real to the child, and we can best help him to rid himself of them, by letting him bring them into the open.

These conversations with S. covered as well quite a lot of the subjects parents worry about. How to tell the child about burying and cemeteries, and how to introduce the fact that we do deliberately kill animals to provide food for ourselves. If these questions can be dealt with quite casually in such a manner they usually satisfy the child's curiosity and eliminate any feelings of anxiety.

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I can remember when I was younger that a beloved relative died and when I asked where she had gone, my nurse, pointing skywards, said 'She's gone up there.' I gazed earnestly upwards trying hard to penetrate the blue distances for any signs of a house or human dwellings and being very puzzled indeed. I couldn't understand how the dead people got 'up there' or what they lived in. I couldn't understand what 'heaven' was, and because I couldn't understand, the question worried and worried me endlessly. I felt that the 'grown-ups' were hiding something from me, and as they only usually hid unpleasant things from me, dying and going to heaven must be rather unpleasant.

And I think, on the whole, that is how most young children's minds work. If they think you are concealing something from them, they will be all the more curious, and their curiosity unsatisfied will turn into anxiety. Give them something on the other hand which is within their own experience, something which they can readily picture and understand, and their curiosity is appeased, the subject no longer interests them, nor does it worry them.

But don't thrust this type of knowledge down their throats. Try and avoid conversations about death and dying in front of them. Don't make them attend funeral services when they are very young, and don't dress them in mourning, and above all, *wait to give them this information until they ask for it spontaneously.*

4

The Case for the Nursery School

*Alas! and as my home I neared,
How very big my nurse appeared,
How great and cool the rooms!*

R.L.S.

‘Surely’, parents used to write to me, ‘a mother is the best person to bring up her child. What is the use of having children if we are going to leave their upbringing in the hands of other people?’ Now I quite agree that the child needs the love of his mother to feel secure and happy. His confidence in her and his trust in her is unbounded, and she can teach him, by her own loving example, how to grow up as she would most like him to grow up. No one else can adequately take the place of a mother.

But sending a child to a nursery school does not mean that he loses all contact with his home and parents. At most nursery schools you are able to send your children for as short or long a time as you wish. Usually it is for two hours or an hour and a half in the morning, so that the mother need not feel she is shelving her responsibility nor losing her influence. Personally I think it is an excellent idea for both child and parent to have a little time during the day spent apart from each other.

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One of the chief advantages of the nursery school is that it is planned solely *for* children; the child is the important factor and the school is built round the child. At home, although the child may be the most important little person in the household, the house is by no means built round the child. It is built and planned chiefly for the convenience and comfort of the adults who live in it. The hallstand or cloak-room has pegs and hooks at comfortable adult shoulder height. Quite impossible for the toddler to put away his own outdoor things and fetch them himself. The tables and chairs are all made to suit adults, and the toddler usually has to sit propped up on a slidy cushion, with his legs dangling into mid-air for his meal-times. All the furniture is large and big and most of the people round him are large and big too.

At the nursery school everything is at toddler level. Coat and hat pegs are easily reachable by even the two-year-olds; chairs and tables all in comfortable miniature. Pictures arranged at their eye level; everything painted in soft bright colours, so dear to the eyes of little children. Here there are heaps of small playmates of their own age, and an abundance of simple constructive toys which will keep their nimble fingers busy, and one or two adults who have nothing to do but attend to them. I sometimes think that if we had kept to the lovely old German name of 'Children's Garden' for these nursery schools, they would have been more readily accepted by parents.

But although the child chiefly 'plays' at the nursery school he does too learn many invaluable lessons that he does not always learn at home, particularly if he is an only child. He learns to adapt himself to communal life—a very difficult lesson and one which we sometimes don't really learn even as adults. He learns to share; he learns to be helpful, because at most nursery schools the children are taught to tidy up

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after themselves, to hang up their own clothes, to keep the flower vases filled with water, to help 'serve' the eleven o'clock milk, and so on.

All these things *can* be learnt at home, it is true, but so often the single-handed mother simply hasn't the time or patience to attend to them. She has such a multitude of other jobs to concern her that more often than not the toddler is rather a nuisance to her, and if she can persuade him to play on his own in the garden or in another room, and not make too many calls on her time or attention, she feels she has had a 'good day'.

However much we love our children, continual day in and day out contact with them is bound to be a bit wearying, particularly when they are at the toddler stage. This two hours spent apart from them enables the mother to get through a lot of her household work unhampered by the demands of an active toddler and she usually meets him again after this period entirely refreshed and ready to be companionable and playful with him.

There is however one other point I should like to make in favour of sending children to a nursery school some time before the age of five, and that is that it does prepare them for going to school when they reach the usual school age. It is often a real shock to the child, who for five solid years has spent almost every hour of his day with his mother, quite suddenly and abruptly to be parted from her for the whole day. Morning nursery school acclimatizes him gradually for this separation, so that by the time he is going to school proper he will be quite accustomed to being away from her and will regard schooling, moreover, merely as a prolongation of his enjoyable nursery school days—and they are enjoyable to most of the youngsters. It will 'suggest' to him in fact that going to school is rather an enjoyable process and

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this is a very healthful outlook for the child to have. I have met two cases of children recently who were without preliminaries introduced to a full day's schooling at the age of five. One, a boy, so disliked it that he had bouts of sickness and diarrhoea throughout two terms. The other, a girl, has fits of crying and mild hysterics whenever the school gate is reached.

I have seen many of these stormy, tearful approaches to the school building, and it has always seemed to me such a pity that such a very essential part of the child's life should be associated with unpleasantness and a sense of coercion. Anything we are forced to do, automatically appears to us to be unpleasant. If we do a thing willingly, then we are more than half-way towards enjoying doing it.

Naturally not all children by any means react as the two examples I have quoted. But many do; and apart from that I do feel it is putting an unnecessary strain on a child, to take him suddenly, at the age of five, from the freedom of home life, to the routine of a full day at school; from the sole companionship of a loving mother, to the detached authority of several strangers.

An objection to the nursery school which is quite frequently voiced by mothers is that they consider their children too young for 'learning'. Actually there is no teaching in the orthodox sense of the word at nursery schools. It is all learning by playing. The usual routine of a nursery school morning is something like this:

After arrival there is a little talk amongst the children and mistress merging into a period of 'free play'. Bricks, constructive toys, toy zoos, a doll's house, and such equipment is brought out and the children either in pairs, groups, or singly play with them just as they like. Then there is a period of play with plasticine or some simple form of handwork.

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This brings them to 'break' with a glass of milk and a romp outdoors. After break there will probably be a story reading period after which the children will try and draw something from the story they have had. And that brings the morning to a close. These activities are varied day by day to include singing, simple nature talks, drill, playing with number and alphabet blocks and similiar activities. Nothing very formidable there, is there?

There are parents, however, who are altogether prejudiced against even two hours' nursery school life daily for their toddlers, and for those I would suggest that they imitate the good things of the nursery school in their own homes. For instance, they can put a couple of nails low down for the child's coats and hats. They can make a small table and chair for his mealtimes, and provide him with the space and scope for free, explorative play. They can encourage him to put on and take off his outdoor things; lace his shoes, lay his own little table and clear it away and so on. The small chair and table, by the way, is not a mere fad. Wherever it is possible to procure these I strongly advise mothers to do so, for they undoubtedly help the child to behave properly at meal-times. It is very difficult to wield a spoon and fork when our plates are at shoulder level, and having wielded them, it is a still more difficult feat to pass the food from spoon to mouth without spilling and messing it over the cloth.

And if he is an only child, then they should try and arrange for him to have some playtime with other children of his own age, because it is not good for a child to have only adult company all day. That is one of the chief values of the nursery school. For a short while the child enters a real child's kingdom, where everything, and the majority of people round him are all his size. For a short while he doesn't have to feel so very small and so alone.

5

Should We Adopt?

The home that wants a baby, and the baby that wants a home are two of the sad problems of life to-day. We had a surprising number of letters from childless married couples who wanted to know whether they should adopt and if so, how they should set about being introduced to a baby. And we also had a good bag of letters from adopters who were writing to tell us of their immense satisfaction in having taken the step and who wanted their experiences passed on to other couples who were hesitating about making the final decision.

Two of the main arguments always put forward against adoption are that 'you won't love the baby as your own', and 'supposing it turns out badly'. With regard to the first statement I have not yet met an adopter who hasn't said that she loved the child as much as if it were her own. I have even met several cases where married couples having despaired of having children of their own have adopted a child, only to surprise themselves and their relatives by producing a child of their own a few years after. These people have told me that they do not feel any difference towards their elder adopted child than to their own little son.

But when we come to the question of how the child will turn out later on, we come up against that thorny old prob-

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lem of heredity versus environment. Considered judgment nowadays is mainly of the opinion that although heredity, naturally, plays a big part in the child's make up, given normal health, it is not so vital finally as environment. What so many would-be adopters fear is that their child will turn out to have all sorts of criminal traits or vices.

'Delinquency', says Dr. Hector Cameron, however, in his book on the *Nervous Child at School*, 'as a whole is the outcome not of inherited tendencies to immorality or crime, but of faults of environment and of management. . . . The delinquent is made, not born. . . . A criminal propensity as such is never inborn. What is inherited is a complex of innumerable temperamental and physical peculiarities, idiosyncrasies and liabilities, sometimes balanced one against the other, sometimes in so unstable an equilibrium *that the individual is highly susceptible to the traction of strong environmental forces.*'

Furthermore the recognized adoption societies take great pains to find out thorough details of the child's parentage, and pride themselves on finding the right baby for the right home. That is they choose children born of the same type, nationality, and religion as the would-be adopters.

If you decide to adopt a child, then decide at the same time that he will be brought up in the full knowledge that he is adopted. It is a great mistake to try and conceal this fact from the growing child. It can be a great emotional shock if he discovers when he is older that his mother and father aren't his own parents.

Naturally you cannot go into details of this sort when he is very young, but as soon as he has reached the age when he will love to hear all about himself as a baby, then you can tell him how very much you wanted a baby, a little boy (or girl) particularly, and how when you saw him amongst all the

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other little babies at the home, you immediately liked him best and chose him from all the others, and brought him to your own home. Most mothers, you can point out, have to take the baby that is born to them, but in his case you specially chose him from amongst heaps of other children.

He may not quite comprehend all this, but the very fact that you chose him from amongst all the other children, to bring to your own house, will build up in his mind a feeling of security and of being loved. Later on he may ask why his own mother didn't keep him, and then you can tell him what you know about his mother. Either that she died when he was still a baby, or that she didn't think she could make a baby really happy, or that she hadn't a nice home ready to bring a baby up in. If you deceive him when he is young, and he later discovers this deception, as he may very well do, he will experience a great emotional shock, and a feeling of insecurity which may cause far greater problems than you will come up against in telling him the truth from the beginning.

Most couples who decide to adopt, adopt one or two children, but to hearten would-be adopters I would like to mention the case of a reader who wrote to us to say that she had adopted *five* children, all steps and stairs in ages like a normal family, and that they were all so tremendously happy and loving that they couldn't resist adopting a sixth!—the baby of their next-door neighbour whose wife had died two months after the child's birth.

It is certainly very much better for the adopted baby to live in the home of a normally married couple, and most registered adoption societies prefer this to adoption by single men or women. It is better too for the child to have the guidance and influence of both a mother and father. Neither parent can really adequately play the role of the

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other, although sadly enough, there are many widows and widowers who have to make this gallant struggle.

It is wiser too not to put off adoption until you are too middle aged; that is until you are beyond the age at which one usually commences a family. As we grow older we tend to get more set in our ways, and to become mentally and physically a little beyond the age when one is really suited to having the care of babies and small children. Naturally this is not so in all cases, but as a general rule it is better to adopt while you are still both young.

With regard to the legal side of adoption, it is important to remember that the adopted child has no claim to the property or estate of his foster parents, and therefore if you adopt and wish the child to inherit your property, you must make a will to that effect. Once the order of adoption is registered, and it is registered in the same way as a birth, the child becomes the actual child of the adopter, just as if he had been born to the couple in the ordinary way. He is completely your child, and the real parents resign all rights to him, but, and personally I think this is a great pity and a quite unnecessary formality, his birth certificate will be stamped with the word adopted.

If you are still hesitating on the brink of adoption, I suggest that you should get a copy of W. J. Drawbell's book, *Experiment in Adoption*. It is a charming and personal account of how they adopted a second child as a companion for their own first child, and apart from the interesting nature of the book it does give a great deal of helpful information on how to treat the adopted child.

6

Father Christmas and the ‘Little People’

*The level of the parlour floor
Was honest, homely, Scottish shore,
But when we climbed upon a chair,
Behold the gorgeous East was there!*

R.L.S.

Round about every Christmas time a crop of letters would reach our office on the Santa Claus problem. Was Father Christmas, as of old, to come down the bedroom chimney with his sack of toys, or were Mummy and Daddy, Aunts and Uncles to take his place? Were there to be fairies, pixies, dwarfs, and giants, or were these little people to be banished firmly from the nursery fireside?

Now it has always seemed to me to be quite impossible to keep all talk of this age-old nursery lore away from one's children. Even if no reference is made to it in one's own household, the child will hear these things talked about by other children, and it is almost impossible to buy a children's annual which isn't packed with references to one or other of the 'little people'.

I do however feel very strongly that it is a pity to allow a child to believe vividly, as they do when they are toddlers,

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in quite mythical people and things, only to learn later that he has been grossly and deliberately misinformed. For one thing it shakes the child's confidence and he is less apt to take as gospel everything his parents later tell him, and secondly, he feels a genuine sense of loss when he discovers that these delightful and beloved playfellows are entirely imaginary.

On the other hand, there is no need to deprive our children of these delightful fables altogether. In the case of Father Christmas, he is as much a part of 25th December as the tinsel, the gaily coloured streamers, the crackers, the snow, and the scarlet and green of the holly decorations. In his scarlet and white cloak, with his reindeer and his bells, he is too intrinsically a part of the Christmas fable to be ousted in even this scientific age. But that is just how he should be presented to the toddler—as a *fable*; not as a real live person. He is just as enjoyable to the child as a pretend person, as he would be if we presented him as real. What we have to remember is that there is a very thin dividing line in the child's mind between fact and fiction. Fiction *is* fact to him, and his imaginative play and fancies are intensely real to him.

Personally I am very anti-fairy and very pro-fable. The old-fashioned Santa Claus was a fairy creature which no one believed in after about the age of eight. On the other hand we can offer our children the real Santa Claus fable which they can enjoy right through their school years. We can tell them of Prince Nicholas of Sweden who so many years ago gave up all his money and belongings so that poorer people than himself could have food, clothes, and toys for the children which would have otherwise been impossible.

We can tell them of all the fascinating international variations of the Santa Claus legend. How the Austrian Santa Claus is always supposed to be accompanied by a little black devil called Krampus. We can tell them how the Dutch

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Santa Claus will expect to find a large Wooden Sabot to fill in the place of a stocking and so on. But fundamentally we should try to explain to them that Santa Claus stands as a symbol for the spirit of good will and kindness which should abound at Christmas time.

This doesn't spoil the fun for a child in the slightest. I have known many toddlers who have been brought up in this way who are still immensely thrilled to get a present from the bearded Father Christmas at our local store and who weave play fantasies around him just as much as they would if he were presented to them as a real person. I have known too, many toddlers who have believed implicitly that there really was a Father Christmas who were bitterly disillusioned when they grew older and found out that the whole thing was untrue.

Fairies and elves can be represented in the same fashion. 'Are there really fairies?' my own child asked me when she was five, 'and can they really do magic?'

'No,' I told her; 'it's just fun to pretend there are fairies and elves who can do anything they want to. They aren't *really* there, we just pretend they are.'

'I think it's such a pity,' said an older friend who overheard the conversation, 'to bring up a child on such practical lines. It seems to me she won't have any imagination at all if you go on like that.'

Yet a few days later, there was a tap on my front door, and S. came in, draped round in an old silk undergarment of mine with a little stick in her hand and announced herself as 'Fairy Mary-Anne'. Fairy Mary-Anne proved to be a delightful creature who was inordinately polite and always extremely good; Fairy Mary-Anne never left any food on her plate at mealtimes and always remembered to say 'please' and 'thank you'. She also invariably cleared the table and washed

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up and the role was so real to her that she never once forgot to call me 'Mrs. W.' and her Daddy 'Mr. W.'. If *we* forgot and called her S. she would say in the gravest manner, 'Oh, I'm not S. you know, I'm Fairy Mary-Anne.'

So much then for the truth ever killing a child's imagination or her delight in fantasy. On the other hand S. never spent a frustrated and irritating afternoon trying to find a real fairy under a mushroom, as a four-year-old friend of hers did, who eventually came into the house tears streaming down his face and saying between sobs 'I *have* been good to-day *all* day, but I *still* haven't seen a fairy under a toadstool like what you said I would Mummy!'

Fairy Mary-Anne was completely real to S. while she was playing that game, but she knew in the back of her mind that it was none the less just a pretend. But this didn't prevent her 'losing' herself in the fantasy at all. In fact, Fairy Mary-Anne visited us off and on for a period of two years and a very useful little creature she was indeed. Whenever S. had a really troublesome fit on I would say, 'Oh, dear, I *do* wish Fairy Mary-Anne would come', and sure enough, out of the door would go crosspatch S. and in would come a very amiable and delightful fairy. Sometimes Fairy Mary-Anne would be invisible, and S. would talk to and play with an imaginary person in such a realistic way that it was really very difficult to realize that there actually wasn't a second child in the garden or the room.

If a child then can play so happily at 'pretend' why go to the deception of telling her that unreal things and people exist?

But to return to Father Christmas. It does seem to me that the real message of Christmas time is often altogether forgotten in centring the child's attention so much on the Santa Claus fable, the Christmas tree, the stockings, and the pre-

Father Christmas and the 'Little People'

sents. Father Christmas isn't, or rather shouldn't be, the central figure in the Christmas canvas. It is not in honour of his birth that 25th December is celebrated, and as the children grow older I think we should tell them the story of the birth of Christ.

'Once upon a time there was a man called Joseph who had a wife called Mary. . . .' There is your start off, just as if it were another of the child's story-book stories. Then you can go on to tell them that their baby, who was called Jesus, grew up to be a very good and exceptional man. He was so good and clever in fact that we celebrate his birthday all over the world, just as we celebrate Anne or John or Timothy's birthday in our own house. You can tell them of the baby's surroundings—the manger, the straw, the donkeys, all the animals, and of the three wise men who brought presents to the baby; and, you conclude, 'that is why we give presents to children and to people we love on Christmas Day, because this baby was a very special sort of baby, and when he grew up he made it his work to show people how to be good and kind'.

7

The Young Dreamer

In the last chapter we dealt fleetingly with the child's delight in games of make-believe. Most children go through a phase of imaginative play and many children indulge in day-dreams. How far is this normal and good for them, and when does it become a bad thing?

A certain amount of imaginative play and make-believe play is a very good thing for the young child, for in this fantasy life he finds a release, or an outlet, for his everyday difficulties and problems. In real everyday life the child is rather an impotent and passive creature. The adults around him are in command and he has to bow to their wishes. To a great extent his day is planned and ordered by them. In his imaginative play he turns the tables. *He* becomes the active partner; *he* issues the commands. In his imaginative play he becomes the grown-up and does all the things he so much wants to do. This is an obviously good outlet for a certain amount of necessary and inevitable repression.

Day-dreaming is rather a different matter. For one thing it is a very passive affair. In make-believe play a child is very active. He is actually doing something all the time, even if it's only strutting round the garden with a piece of wood in his mouth, to represent a pipe, and his hands behind his back in imitation of Daddy. His mind and his body are working

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hard. In day-dreaming the body is completely idle while only the mind travels. Day-dreaming as long as it is not carried to an unreasonable length is quite harmless. It is the older child's release from the difficulties and problems of everyday life, just as make-believe play is the younger child's form of release.

But sometimes it is carried to an unreasonable degree and the child makes no effort to cope with everyday life but merely finds satisfaction in his dreams. For instance he may want terribly to be the 'clever' boy of the school and have everyone admire his academic ability. But instead of working hard and trying to study, he leaves his books closed on the table while he lies back and indulges in a very delightful and real day-dream in which he does become, for that time at least, the top boy of the form. It is, in fact, so real that he comes back only reluctantly to everyday life. He comes back to everyday problems more and more reluctantly, and conversely, indulges in his day-dreams more frequently. He finds them not a release, but an escape, and a very easy escape.

If day-dreaming is carried to these lengths then it is a harmful thing and we should try, by talking to the child, and finding out his ambitions, to discover where his inclinations are and what are the everyday obstacles to his fulfilling them. We can then either help to remove these obstacles, or to divert his interests into some channel which it is within his abilities to explore. Excessive day-dreaming is bad too because it is such a solitary thing. It drives the child back into himself more than ever. A dreamer never shares his day-dreams.

Make-believe play on the other hand is more often than not shared with another child or children, or even with the parents who are expected to take part, and although it is all

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'pretend' to the child, at the time it is very real. She pretends that she is a fairy, and she *is* a fairy; she pretends to touch a flower with a magic wand and turn it into an elephant, and it *is* an elephant. At this point possibly she runs into her mother and says breathlessly, 'Mummy, there's an elephant in the garden; it's almost as big as the house. I had a ride on its back; it was simply lovely.'

'Oh, darling,' says Mummy, very shocked, 'you mustn't tell such stories (stories here meaning fibs). You must learn to tell only the truth.'

When I suggest to such mothers that they should enter into the spirit of the child's make-believe and join in the pretence, they say, 'but unless we teach the child how important the *truth* is, always, surely she will grow up to be very casual about speaking the truth?'

To a certain extent that is right, but the child is very able to distinguish in her own mind between a 'lie' of make-believe and an everyday lie which has been told to save her from a scolding or admitting to some little misdemeanour. When she says her teddy bear suddenly came alive and danced with her, that is make-believe, but when, to explain a spilt cup of milk, she says her teddy bear came alive and knocked it over and *wasn't* it naughty of him, that is just deliberately making make-believe a cover for an accident. In the first case, I think we can, with a free conscience, say, 'Oh, darling, what fun that "pretend" must have been,' without the slightest qualm that we are encouraging her to be untruthful. But in the second case I most certainly think one should take the line, 'You know very well that *you* really knocked the cup of milk over, and that teddy didn't, and it's not a bit nice to pretend to Mummy that teddy did it. In fact, that's what we call a "lie" and nobody likes people who tell lies. Now come on, I'm not a bit cross about it, if you tell me

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the truth, you *did* knock the milk over, didn't you?' And when she owns up to it, then, of course, remember that you must keep your word and *not* be cross.

Untruthfulness in children is a very unpleasant trait. Sometimes children lie through fear—fear of a punishment, fear of a tremendous scolding and so on. It is obvious how we should behave in order to prevent lying from this cause.

Sometimes children lie through a desire for acclamation. They want terribly to attract attention, say, at school, so they tell their schoolfellows that their daddy is a wonderful soldier, that he has won the V.C., that he has done all manner of amazing things, when quite possibly Daddy has some quiet civilian wartime job. In such cases we must try and find out why the child feels himself so inferior and try and build up his belief in himself and his environment.

But make-believe 'lies' are quite another thing and quite a harmless thing, and it is a shame to discourage a child from his fantasies by too rigid an adherence to everyday rules.

Their fantasies too help to give the parent some insight into the child's difficulties and troubles. S. for instance, at one period had an unseen playmate called Pelly. No one ever saw Pelly, of course, but he accompanied her a good deal on her daily walks and in her nursery games, and sometimes as she sat talking to this imaginary creature, helping him to sit at the table, feeding an imaginary mouth, and so on, it was difficult not to believe that 'Something' was there which we couldn't see.

Pelly, however, was a wretched creature. He was always doing naughty things. Pelly, for instance, invariably turned my workbox upside down when my back was turned, to get hold of my scissors. Pelly was also responsible for muddling up my bookshelves and putting S.'s books in amongst them. Pelly, in other words, gave rather violent expression to many

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of the things S. wanted and had asked for at some time or another, but which I had disregarded. When eventually I took the disguised hint, and gave S. a nice big pair of blunt-ended scissors of her very own, also a pretty blue bookcase which would hold all her books and had space for more, Pelly's wrong-doings in this direction ceased, and gradually Pelly disappeared altogether and returned in the pleasant form of Fairy Mary-Anne to whom I have already referred.

Many children, particularly lonely children, have these unseen playmates and they are great fun and often helpful to parents as clues to the child's particular troubles of the time. There was for instance J. who was seven years old when a baby sister was introduced into the family. J. said he loved his little sister, and indeed while adults were present he was very attentive to her. But round about this time J. introduced an unseen playmate whom he called 'Gobby'. One day his mother came into the nursery to see J. kicking some of his little sister's pretty possessions about. 'What on earth are you doing, you naughty little boy?' she exclaimed.

'I'm not doing anything,' said J. gravely and with great dignity. 'That was Gobby.'

On another occasion she discovered J. slapping the baby very vindictively. Once again Gobby, horrid, but useful Gobby, was the criminal.

J. was obviously suffering very badly from jealousy of the baby. It was quite true, he did love her, but he terribly resented the fact that she seemed first in his mother's affections and he only second. When J's mother paid more attention to him, spent a certain amount of each day exclusively with him, enlisted his help, as being such 'a big grown-up boy and *such* a help to his Mummy,' with some of the jobs in connection with the baby, his attitude quite changed, and Gobby gradually disappeared from the scene as a wrongdoer.

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You can say, of course, that this talk of Gobby, Pelly and so on are 'lies' on the part of the child to evade a scolding for their wrong-doings, but in that case there would be no need to create their good counterparts—the Fairy Mary-Annes. When an adult has had a bad night or has a really bad headache or some such trouble, she is usually inclined to be nervy and bad-tempered. She probably scolds and shouts at the children more than usual and flies quickly into a temper. She tells her husband, 'You know, after a bad night like that I feel *quite a different person*.' It's a familiar phrase, isn't it, and I daresay you have used it, as I have, scores of times? Well, the child often feels that way, too, but with his vivid imagination goes a step further—he creates that different person.

8

The Young Rebel

A little book of instruction which was published in 1791 admonished its young readers that

*Sweetness of temper in a child
To favour recommends;
The pliant, affable and mild
Are sure of gaining friends.*

That was in 1791. But two centuries afterwards I am not sure that grown-ups at least are not still in sympathy with that message. 'The pliant, affable and mild' still recommend themselves to the adults in their charge, and it is because the young child usually differs so much from this that he comes in conflict with his parents. But I am not going to suggest ways of preventing the child from becoming a young rebel; I have already covered that very fully in another book. Parents didn't write to us on the subject of prevention, but they *did* write to us, in wails of despair, to ask what they could do as a cure for young Jane or small David who was so disobedient, who got into tantrums, who wouldn't do as he was told, and so on.

I think children usually become young rebels either because they have had too weak a discipline, or too severe a

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discipline. Their mother has given in to them and they have grown into domineering little dictators. Or she has expected far too high a standard from them and they have fallen below her expectations. If you have let your child become 'boss' of you, then it is going to take a long slow time to reverse the roles.

Tantrums and defiance were the two forms of 'naughtiness' which most parents who wrote to us were faced with. A child in a real tantrum is a distressing and frightening spectacle. He screams and kicks, he holds his breath and goes purple and then blue in the face, so that the apprehensive parent thinks he will choke, he howls at the top of the voice and, in other words, uses every means at his disposal to wear down his mother's resistance. I have always found the best way to deal with a tantrum, is to pick the child up quietly and firmly right at the beginning and put him in his cot, or in another room on his own, until he has got over it. But this should not be done 'as a punishment', but because 'we don't want him with us while he is making such a dreadful noise'.

It's not much fun to scream and kick without an audience, and if mother isn't in the room there is no hope of getting his own way by tiring her out. She will be comfortably and sensibly settled almost out of earshot, and the only person who will be tired out is the toddler himself. Consistent treatment on these lines will usually deal effectively with such tantrums after a time. Not at once, of course. To begin with he will prolong his spell of crying always in the hope that his mother will eventually come and pacify him as formerly. But gradually he will tumble to the fact that she only comes to him when he has *stopped* crying.

We must, however, make sure that there is no underlying reason for these outbursts of temper. Undisciplined be-

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haviour of this sort is often an expression of an underlying emotional disturbance, and what the child will then need is *more* affectionate and sympathetic treatment. A little wholesome neglect of a child is a good thing. I mean that the child should learn to play and amuse himself independently of his mother. But we must not carry this to an extreme and not give the child sufficient attention and expressed love. Children are very much in need of contact with their parents, and they need too a certain amount of demonstrated love and affection if they are to feel really secure and sure of themselves.

Most mothers have very full days and in their efforts to deal with housework, cooking, mending, shopping, and so on they may tend not to spend sufficient time with the child. I think it is a very good and necessary thing to give at least half an hour daily solely to the child. This can either be spent in some shared play, in reading or story telling, in some outdoor activity—whatever the individual child most likes. If he feels too ‘shut-out’ from his mother’s life, he may find that the only way of getting her undivided attention is by some display of temper or emotional outburst.

If this is the reason for his tantrums, then, of course to put him in another room or disregard them will only make matters worse. We should review our time-table and see if he is getting enough of our undivided attention and company and put this right if he isn’t.

Curiously enough we experienced a phase of this with S. when she was nearly six. She started a habit of whining whenever her father appeared in the house. She continued to whine and grizzle until he lost his temper, as he invariably did, when there was a grand scene and a final display of tears. I thought she did this merely to attract attention to herself, so persuaded my husband to ignore her altogether

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and let her whine and grizzle to her heart's content. But indeed, this merely continued to a worse degree, and then I realized that for the past few months she had seen practically nothing of her father. He had been tremendously busy and she only saw him at a very hurried breakfast, and again at a very hurried fifteen minutes' tea. She had indeed whined to attract his attention. She *needed* in fact his attention, and this was her only way of expressing her need.

We talked it over, and he agreed to squeeze twenty minutes out of his day to be entirely with her. From then on after tea, for about fifteen to twenty minutes he either played her beloved game of 'bears', or had a jolly talk with her while she perched on his lap, or, if he had been unable to come in at tea, he would make a point of going up to her in her bedroom to tell her a good night story. The whining ceased completely from the second day of the experiment!

I think the defiant child is more difficult to deal with, partly because when we are openly and blandly defied we find it is so difficult to keep our own tempers and we are led into making the great mistake of allowing a small point to become an important issue.

'Pick up your glove, Jane,' you say casually.

'Won't,' says Jane, eyeing you like a cat watches a mouse.

'Pick up your glove at once,' you repeat with quickly rising anger.

'Won't,' says Jane, gleefully and challengingly.

'If you don't pick it up this minute I shall spank you.'

'Don't care,' says Jane, probably wishing she had done it in the first place, but hating to give in now. (Don't you hate giving in?)

Interlude for smacks followed by an outburst of crying.

'Now will you pick it up?' says Mummy.

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'No, I won't,' sobs Jane, and so on, until a defeated mother stalks away leaving a very unhappy but victorious child.

Well, what can one do about it? No use saying now never let it arise in the first place, it has arisen over and over again. Once a child has got into the habit of openly defying her mother, I think the first step towards her reclamation is to give her very few openings for being stubborn. Make a point of issuing as few commands as you possibly can. Secondly, when you do tell her to do something, and she refuses, don't enter into any argument with her but punish her in some indirect way so that she will come to the conclusion that defiance means deprivation.

Take the glove incident for instance. At her first refusal to pick it up, say 'Very well,' quietly, and sit down with a book or your sewing.

Jane will look curiously at you and then say after a bit, 'Come on, Mummy, let's go out or we'll be too late.'

'I know,' you say, still very quietly and off-handedly. 'I'm just waiting for you to pick up your glove,' and return to your book. I wouldn't mind taking a bet with you that the offending glove will very soon be picked up, and if it isn't, then don't go out; deprive her of the outing, but don't refer to the incident at all.

A child has got to learn to submit to authority. She will have to do so in adult life, and childhood should accustom her to this inevitable fact. But you are more likely to get her to be obedient by such methods, than by arguments, tempers, and smackings. A punishment in the form of some deprivation goes much deeper. We must remember that young children are rather like little barbarians; they are very rarely altruistic. And just as they will do a great deal in response to a bribe, or 'reward', so they will obey very much more

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quickly at the threat of the withdrawal of some beloved privilege and treat.

Where a child is altogether maladjusted, and we can find no way of handling him, then it is possible that he needs specialized psychiatric treatment at a child guidance clinic or from a private practising psychiatrist. But such cases are fortunately the exceptions, and the majority of children are normal and will respond to sympathetic and understanding treatment.

So, to summarize, with tantrums and defiance, the two things to examine are your own response to the child's behaviour, *and your relationship with him*. Is this latter satisfactory or is his behaviour an expression of some emotional disturbance? And are you setting too high a standard of conduct for his age. Under seven years a normal child is not by nature docile, polite, and obedient.

9

Faddy Children

Whenever the question of mealtime problems come up I am reminded of that old saying that you can take a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink. You can sit a child at the table but you cannot force him to eat. A healthy child is usually a hungry child, and if we do not spoil his appetite with little tit-bits in between meals he will generally sit down to table and be eager for his food. This is true of most children generally speaking if they have not learnt bad food habits or have been taught to be faddy, but unfortunately a great number of children acquire all sorts of food fads between babyhood and toddler-hood.

Weaning time is the first big milestone in the child's meal-time travels, and our treatment of him at this stage is very important, not only dietetically but psychologically as well. I happened recently to come across the *Baby Progress Book* which my mother had kept since the day I was born, and I found that after having breast-fed me with *no extras* for nine months the great day came for weaning. This she did by packing her suitcase and going away for a month, leaving the nurse to induce me on to bottle feeds and spoon and cup feeds.

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Apparently I disliked this sudden change as much as most infants would and the progress book tells a sad history of the daily battles between the nurse and myself. Hunger, I suppose, drove me eventually into giving in and my mother recorded with evident satisfaction and relief, 'Baby is at last taking to solids.' Now everything in the nursery quarters seemed rosy, but I am convinced that this disastrous method of weaning laid the foundations for my bad food habits from toddler-hood onwards. Mealtimes, I can remember even now, were a nightmare period dreaded by myself and the entire household. The weary battles that were fought each time a new food was put in front of me; the innumerable times I was late for afternoon school, because I had taken two hours to force a meal down, these, I am sure, could have been avoided had my weaning time been less mis-managed.

Nowadays, if we are wise, we give the baby extras from the age of three or four months—extras in the way of orange juice, halibut or cod liver oil, bone and vegetable broth, and various cereals. By the time the modern baby has reached six months he is having, or should be having, quite a varied little diet in addition to his breast feeds. This is good for him not only from the point of view of actual food values, but because he is getting accustomed as well to new tastes and strange textures.

When we actually come to wean him from breast or bottle nowadays instead of making the change in one day, or even in one week, we spread it over five weeks. The change is made so gradually, that the infant barely realizes the change is occurring. In addition, we should be careful to introduce new foods very gradually as well. If we are starting him on a new cereal, instead of giving him this straight away, add just a little of the new food to his customary cereals, then

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day by day increase the addition of the new food until ultimately he is having none of his old cereal.

In this way weaning the child on to a full and mixed diet can be accomplished without any setbacks, and without the child ever experiencing distaste for his meals, and discovering, incidentally, that what he eats, and how much he eats, is of tremendous importance to his mother. A baby of ten months is quite capable of taking in the fact that if he refuses to eat he will have his mother and the rest of the household dancing attendance round him, coaxing him, worrying over him, and in every way displaying the most gratifying interest. And once he has experienced this he will be very tempted to try the delightful trick out again and again.

The next milestone is when the child begins to try and feed himself. What do you do then? If you are wise you will wrap him round in a large bib, give him a tin bowl and let him get on with the job as well as he can. Stand by to help him guide the spoon to his mouth and to prevent him lifting up his plate and turning it upside down, but don't, in exasperation, take the spoon away from his eager hand, and feed him yourself. I know it is quicker, and vastly cleaner this way, but the sooner a child becomes independent over his feeding the better for you. If you discourage him at this stage, and continue to feed him too long, the day will come when he is too lazy to want to try and do it himself. But in these days of china shortage, I strongly advise you to serve his food on a tin plate and in a tin mug.

Eventually, if you are patient, he will learn to feed himself quite dexterously and moderately cleanly, and when this stage has been reached it is quite a temptation to sit him in his high chair at the table to take meals with the family. Personally, however, I think the toddler is far better left to himself at mealtimes, and I think it is well worth while to

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plan your day so that he can be fed either before or after your own meals. For one thing he can feed at his own pace; his mother can give him the attention he will need and will be able to have her own meal peacefully; and finally he will not be introduced to the possible food fads of the adults.

It is not a good thing for the toddler to notice his father always declining the greens or the carrots 'because he doesn't like them', or his mother missing the cheese dishes because 'they disagree with her', and so on. It will encourage him to follow suit. Moreover, adults often have spices with their food, such as pickles, sauces, vinegar, etc., which are not good for young digestions. The child will want to try them too, will probably be refused and discussions about 'what he should eat and what he shouldn't eat' will be started.

This is not a good practice. A child should learn to take his food as a matter of course, without fuss and without comment. But unless he has an exceptionally well-behaved adult family round him he will soon learn to pick up likes and dislikes if he joins the family circle too young. When he is five is quite time enough to take his meals at the table.

I don't think it is ever wise to force a child to eat some dish which he really detests and which really upsets him. If there is such a dish I think the wisest plan is to leave it out of his menu altogether. But if he merely 'dislikes' trying any new food we should teach him that food is eaten not solely for pleasure but for health as well. He must regard it as medicine and eat it whether he likes the taste or not. If this is the usual practice in the household, and we are tactful in only giving him smallish helpings of the not-so-favourite dishes, he will probably fall in line with the rest of the family.

A faddy child is a nuisance in any household, and nowadays, when foodstuffs are scarce, he can be an abso-

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lute menace. But I am convinced that in the majority of cases, these fads would not arise if mealtimes were always treated in the casual, matter-of-fact manner suggested. What so often happens is that the mother 'fusses'. Jane says she doesn't like toasted cheese, so mummy coaxes her mouthful by mouthful to eat it up. Jane thinks this is rather fun and tries it on with the shepherd's pie the next day. Mummy refuses to spoon-feed her again, Jane refuses to eat, mother scolds, pleads, punishes, looks worried and exasperated by turn; Jane cries, a spoonful is pushed down her throat by mother, and between sobbing and swallowing she chokes or is sick; and that is the end of that particular mealtime drama. But she will probably try it on over and over again, because few children can resist the temptation of being in the lime-light, even if it isn't a particularly pleasant limelight.

If a child behaves in this way, then leave her alone. Put her serving in front of her and take no notice of her. If she doesn't eat it, remove it without comment. It won't matter if for a day or two she doesn't eat very much. A few days on light rations won't hurt the healthy child, and eventually she will be driven by her own appetite into accepting the food. Moreover, it's not much fun refusing to eat if no one cares a jot whether you do or you don't.

I had this experience with S. after she had been ill on one occasion. She had been in bed for over a month, and was naturally run down and 'peaky' when she was at last allowed up. The doctor told me to 'build her up'. I presented her with all sorts of nourishing attractive dishes, but her appetite only being slight after so much inactivity, she refused most of them. I was worried naturally and foolish enough to let her see it, and the more I worried and coaxed the less she ate. So finally, one dinner time I gave her the same as the rest of us were eating.

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‘You’re quite well now, S.,’ I said (she wasn’t in actual fact), ‘and there’s no need for you to have special things now. I’ve made you a milk pudding, but you needn’t eat it if you don’t want. You can have the steamed pudding we are all having.’

S. stared at me in unbelieving astonishment. She ate the merest particle of food, and no pudding of either sort. I cheerfully took the dishes away and made no comment. The same thing happened for the next two days and I still maintained an apparent indifference; and then S. started eating with all her old enthusiasm. I praised her then, not too effusively, but enough to let her see that by eating she would get more attention than by refraining from her meals, and we have not looked back from that day.

Food fads of this sort, like the other bad habits of the nursery, will only be increased if we show too much concern about them. I know it is most awfully difficult, where food and health are concerned, to try to seem indifferent and to allow the child to go without its meals for a few days, but it will be found well worth while eventually in most cases.

If a child is sick or convalescent then it is as well to compromise a bit, tempting him with small helpings very tastefully served up. If he dislikes milk, for instance, pander to his whims for this period at least, and give it to him as a milk jelly, coloured a gay pink or green. Steamed fish, so useful for sick children, is often quite readily acceptable if served up as a steamed fish pudding made in an individual mould and decorated with chopped parsley. A sick child must eat a certain amount unless he is to become very weak, but it is better to tempt his appetite with camouflaged dishes than to sit by his bedside while you coax and cajole his meal down him spoonful by spoonful.

A Mixed Bag

*You may give them your love, but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.*

What are some of the other difficulties that crop up pretty frequently during the nursery years? Destructiveness, shyness, and temper and anger, I should say, were the three to rank next in frequency after lying and tantrums and defiance and faddiness.

What can we do about the destructive child? He spoils everything, tears his books, breaks his toys, nothing seems safe with him. I think what we have to remember in the first place is that most children go through a destructive phase; it is partly their way of learning. Through making up, building, destroying, creating, finding out how things grow and how they work in every possible way, the toddler learns many useful lessons, not the least of them being muscular co-ordination. He doesn't understand that to take his toy to bits in such a way that it can't be mended again is 'naughty'. He just wants to find out 'how it goes'.

During this phase, round about the second or third year, the best plan is to give the child equipment and toy material that isn't very valuable or costly. Let him mess about with it *how he likes*. Building bricks are excellent at this stage, or

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any sort of materials which can be built up into towers or slotted into each other. Things that can be pulled apart and fitted together again. Newspaper that can be torn to shreds. Plasticine which can be moulded and patted and pawed about unendingly. Large pieces of blank paper on which he can scribble.

Children too are often destructive because their environment does not always allow sufficient scope for the expenditure of their muscular energies, and it is essential, particularly for the vigorous three to five year olds, to have scope for noisy, messy play. I was visiting in a house recently where we were all adults except for one little girl, Mary, aged four and a half. She was awfully 'good' during the two hours' tea-visiting period and behaved very prettily. Then gradually all the visitors left until her mother and myself were the only adults left. Her mother put a pair of rompers over Mary's dainty frock, cleared away the occasional tables and smilingly said, 'Now you can play, dear.' What did Mary do? She tore round that room at express speed; she whirled into the garden shouting, laughing, whooping, and even screaming. Her wise mother smiled rather diffidently at me. 'I hope you don't mind the hulla-balloo,' she said, 'but I thought Mary had better "let off steam".'

They *have* to 'let off steam' occasionally at this age. They have abundant energies, and unless these are released in the sort of play natural to their age and development, they will find release through some less desirable channels.

The shy child can develop into a very pathetic little person. The baby is usually a friendly, sociable little creature, who will quite cheerfully play with anyone kindly enough to stop beside his playpen and join in his simple amusements. But somewhere about the third year he begins to show a certain

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timidity when adult strangers are presented to him. He will hang his head, slink behind his mother's legs and refuse to speak.

During this phase we can help him best by not insisting on his speaking to visitors, but merely telling him, after they have gone, that it is 'polite and grown-up' to say 'good afternoon' when anyone says it to you. You can tell him that he needn't say any more than that if he doesn't want to. What you don't want to do is to bully or tease him, insisting on his talking to visitors, or ridiculing him because he won't. Ridicule is a very cruel weapon and we should never make use of it in our dealings with children. The other unhelpful attitude is to talk about the shyness in front of the child.

'Oh, it's no good speaking to Michael. He's such a silly and so shy, he won't speak to a soul.' And everyone coaxes and talks to Michael until in the end the best part of the afternoon pivots round him. Far from curing his shyness this will only help to prolong it, for he will love the attention which it brings him.

Like most of the other troubles, if handled sensibly he will outgrow this phase, particularly if we do not allow too much attention to be focused on him when strangers are present. One cause of shyness is self-consciousness, and this will only be aggravated if the child thinks everyone is concerned with him. But if he finds that the adults come chiefly to talk to his parents and take very little notice of him, he will lose his self-consciousness and be all the more ready to be sociable.

And above all don't expect too much of the toddler. He has only just learnt to co-operate in 'social' life with play-mates of his own age. He will need a little time yet to adjust himself to co-operating with adult strangers. If we don't bother him too much at this period, he will gradually, in

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most cases, get more confidence himself and will very likely develop into a normal, jolly, sociable young creature.

Displays of temper and outbursts of anger are by no means outgrown when the child leaves the tantrum stage behind him. Anger is quite a normal emotion, even in a child. It has to be controlled, naturally, but not repressed altogether. We can help the child to control his temper and to direct the energies behind it into more constructive channels. Ask yourself to begin with not why is he so bad tempered, but what usually causes an outburst of temper. A child doesn't usually fly into utterly unreasonable rages. He is quite probably goaded into them by the provoking demands of some adult which interfere with his mood or occupation of the moment.

The child is having a glorious game in his nursery. In bounces mother, looks at the natural disorder and says, 'What a frightful mess, you little hooligan. Just clear up the litter, John, and go and wash your hands and face. And just *look* at your shirt. I never did see such an untidy boy. No, not when you've finished your fort, but this very minute.' And so on, and so on. Mothers have no idea, I'm sure, how much they do nag and natter at their children, and how infuriating it can be. If it's their playtime, let them *play*; let them get messy, and let them be noisy. They can always clean up at mealtimes and bedtimes, but don't burst in on their enjoyment and make them clean themselves and the room just because 'you can't bear to see the mess'.

Another child of only three was provoked into a terrific display of temper because her mother refused to give her her beloved doll until she said 'please'. After shouting and screaming, Joan suddenly started hitting her mother, who promptly hit her back. Joan redoubled her efforts and there was of course a great scene. But it is not wise for the adult

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to retaliate in this way. It is far better to say in a soft, quiet voice, 'No, Joan musn't do that. Joan must be nice and gentle, like Mummy.'

Remember what you *are* and what you *do* are of great importance to the child who will take her cue eventually from your behaviour and deportment.

II

What Books?

I do so want him to learn to love books and to appreciate good literature, but he *will* buy those awful comics; what books should I get him really to hold his interest?’

Personally I don’t think it matters at all what a child reads when he is young, so long as he reads. Once a child has learnt to read and shows enthusiasm for reading, providing we have some bookshelves in the house which are ornamented with a good selection of varied books, we can leave his natural curiosity to do the rest.

A keen child will read anything he can lay his hands on, from Macaulay’s *History of England* to *Comic Cuts*, and I think if we can provide him with a range which stretches between and includes these two extremes we shall be doing him a service. While he is young he will not differentiate a great deal between the two extremes—it is just so much reading as far as he is concerned, but as he grows older and his appetite has been somewhat appeased, he will begin to be selective in his reading, to like certain authors more than others, and to favour certain types of books.

But I do feel most strongly that it is important for a child to have an abundance and variety of books around him at home, and to have parents who read voraciously.

As soon as a child has learnt to handle books properly we should throw our bookshelves open to him without any

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restrictions, providing of course that we have got something more on them than fiction. Reading is not only an excellent hobby and leisure pastime, but it can be a means of adding to the child's knowledge as well. Moreover, we should teach him, when he can read, how to handle reference books intelligently, so that he is able to look up any subject he wants to, and to provide him with a first-class encyclopaedia.

Books are expensive things and of course it is not always possible to provide many in the home, but the child can still be introduced to the very excellent children's departments which most public libraries have. These departments are usually very delightfully arranged, with low tables and chairs, low bookshelves, and gay with flowers and nature pictures. They are an excellent place for children to read and study in and personally I think they should be taught to use them from the age of eight, at the latest, at which age they are allowed, at most libraries, to have their own tickets.

As I have already said, a child will read absolutely anything he can lay hands on, and while I think he should be allowed the usual comics, school, and adventure stories, I do think it is a good thing to give him also a fair amount of informative books. The child from six to eight years particularly will be most interested in 'true' stories, books giving real information on birds, flowers, trees, moths, animals, where coal comes from, and natural history generally. It is amazing how quick these young people are to understand and what long memories they have for the information they get in this way. Fiction will always appeal to their imaginative minds, but fact as well will have a strong hold on the very practical side of these young people's outlook.

You will have to teach your child to respect books from a very early age, but you cannot expect much result until he is about six. Then he should be taught that books must be

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handled with great care, and that their leaves should not be dog-eared nor scribbled over. It is a great incentive if he is told that as soon as he has learnt to be really tidy and clean with his own books, he will be allowed to look at and to read yours.

But at this age, when he is just beginning to learn to write and spell the desire to 'scribble' is overwhelmingly strong, and I think it is a good plan to make him some rough 'books' in which he can scribble, write, draw, and paint to his heart's content. I make them of about a dozen sheets of cheap thick typing paper, the kind which is used for duplicating purposes, sewn down the side and covered with two pieces of stiff cardboard. I rule about half the pages and leave about half blank—intermingled so that the child can write and draw as he pleases. These books are a great success, and in S.'s case at least have been a great incentive to writing and learning to spell, and in planning a consecutive story. And since they have become an integral part of her bookshelf she has given up scribbling or writing on the blank pages of her story books.

A bookcase too is a great incentive to keeping the books tidy and in good order. A child's bookshelf is better home carpentered so that one can include one very high shelf at least to house the tall annuals. It is better if it can be hung, of course low enough for the child to reach, and it can be painted a gay and attractive colour. When he has his own bookcase he should be taught to replace the books he is not reading, and to keep the shelves reasonably tidy.

Now for some pointers as to the type of books the children will enjoy at varying ages.

Toddlers of from two to five will like short stories very fully and brightly illustrated. Their attention cannot be held for very long at a stretch at this period, so the shorter

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the story the better. Beatrix Potter, Alison Uttley, Enid Blyton are all very popular writers for this group and such series stories as *Little Black Sambo*, *Ameliaranne*, *Peter Rabbit*, and *Johnny Crow* are all good buys. He will like these books read to him over and over again until he knows them almost by heart. In fact, the more familiar they are, the more he will like them. Nursery rhymes with their easy jingles will please him too.

The five to eight year old can manage a longer story, and even a book read chapter by chapter, such as *Peter Pan*, the beloved *A. A. Milne* books, and the very excellent and inexpensive *Puffin* books. The *Rupert* stories have, too, a great fascination, with their mixture of fantasy, adventure, and drama, from six years to ten even.

From ten upwards books of adventure, school stories and detective stories will make a strong appeal to boys, while school, adventure and stories of home life will make most appeal to girls. The ten to twelve year old will prefer school stories almost to any other type of book and this is really very understandable. At this age school life and school interests dominate the child more than anything else, and, as the disappointed adult will turn to highly coloured romantic fiction to find compensation for the drabness of everyday life, the schoolboy turns to school stories for the enlargement of his experiences in that sphere of life.

He finds certain restraints and humbling incidents in his school life, and he therefore finds a good deal of compensation in the highly coloured school romances written for this age, in which the boys are unusually cheeky and fortunate, and the schoolmasters ingenuous to a degree. So don't be disappointed if your young son and daughter suddenly show a voracious appetite for this type of book. It is quite a harmless phase and will soon wear off.

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From thirteen years upwards children show less and less interest in this type of fiction, when detective stories and adventure books stand highest in their choice. They will still appreciate good informative books at this age too, particularly those dealing with hobbies, chemistry, home carpentering, nature study, and so on.

For these older groups, books such as *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *Westward Ho!*, the *Just So Stories*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Lorna Doone*, most of Dickens and particularly the *Christmas Carol*, *David Copperfield*, and *Pickwick Papers*, make a strong appeal. *Black Beauty* is still a firm favourite with both boys and girls; Scott, particularly *Ivanhoe*, is fairly popular, and of course the children's 'classics', such as the books of Ballantyne and Marryat. Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, and the adventure stories of Wells, such as *The Invisible Man*, *First Men in the Moon*, etc., and Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories are all very popular. The Arthur Ransome and Enid Blyton books are very popular with both sexes, and Louisa Alcott's books, *Little Women*, *Good Wives*, *Jo's Boys* are as firm favourites with the girls of to-day as they were with their mothers and their grandmothers. Susan Coolidge and L. M. Montgomery are also popular with girls, as are the novels of Brontë, particularly *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

But this is only a very rough 'catalogue' designed mainly to show how you can mix the good with the not so good books and still captivate their imaginations. For the technical and hobby books your own children must be your guide. Most children have some definite interest and enthusiasms, and you want to encourage this for all your worth by helping them to buy equipment and books on the subject. The interests started and fostered in childhood often remain with us all our life, and can in fact become our life's work.

